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Wüest, Bruno ; Fossati, Flavia

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# **Quantitative discursive institutionalism: a comparison of labour market policy discourse across Western Europe**

Bruno Wueest and Flavia Fossati

**ABSTRACT** Calls for more generalizable empirical examinations rank among the top priorities of discursive institutionalists. However, there are hardly any approaches that address the specific challenges of such examinations with regard to the systematic comparison of public discourses across countries. This contribution first develops a methodological framework for a comprehensive study of public discourse and subsequently applies it to study labour market policy discourse in six Western European countries from 2004 until 2006. Subsequently, the frame analysis shows that ideas brought forward in these public discourses relate to the three major concepts identified by the comparative political economy literature: corporatism, neoliberalism and compensation. Furthermore, the findings corroborate the expectations derived from the discursive institutionalist literature, since the salience of the frames does systematically vary according to the institutional legacies of the countries as well as to the interests of the actors involved.

**KEY WORDS** Compensation; corporatism; discursive institutionalism; frame analysis; labour market policy; neoliberalism.

## **INTRODUCTION**

For at least three decades scholars have been ‘bringing ideas back in’ to political science (Lieberman 2002: 697). Thus discursive institutionalist<sup>1</sup> approaches, which rely on a combination of theories on ideational processes with arguments based on the neo-institutionalism school, recently have gained considerable importance (see Schmidt [2008] and [2011]). One of the most important advantages of this discursive institutionalist literature is that it provides a clear conceptual framework to systematically compare both incremental and radical policy change across countries. However, despite the undisputed merits of these

studies, their empirical research strategies rarely go beyond qualitative case study analysis. In fact, the state of the art in discursive institutionalist studies is to analyse particular discourses in the context of specific reforms or events, whether in parliamentary debates (Smith and Hay 2008), party politics (Ross 2000a; Crespy 2010), governments (Cox 2001), or selected parts of civil society like experts or grassroots movements (Anderson 2008; Goodin and Dryzek 2006). We are thus able to learn how and why discursive actions alter the course of particular policy processes or how specific discourses relate to long-standing institutional variations between countries. However, although these contributions are theoretically insightful and empirically rich, their focus on a narrow set of actors and countries always faces the necessity to justify why their cases provide especially helpful evidence and do not just represent idiosyncratic evidence.

What the previous literature leaves open is whether it can be shown that discourse interacts with the institutional context also in a systematically comparative way. Hence, focusing on specific vehicles of specific discourses – as for instance parliamentary floor debates – might not allow analysis of their implications on everyday politics. On these grounds, recent accounts in the state of the discursive institutionalist literature forcefully call for a departure from the typical approach and demand more comprehensive and quantitative studies (e.g. Béland and Cox 2011: 697; Schmidt 2008). This article tries to accommodate this demand by proposing an approach that allows a systematic comparative analysis in line with discursive institutionalism. More precisely, the present contribution draws on conceptual ideas and methodological considerations from the literature on quantitative content analyses to develop an approach that allows the role of institutions, interests and ideas in mediatized discourse to be analysed (see Wueest 2013). Of course, there are already numerous approaches that deal with the challenges of systematically comparing discourse across countries; the most notable examples include the ‘critical discourse analysis’ (van Dijk 2000), but also the ‘discourse network’ approach as suggested by Leifeld and Haunss (2012), the

‘discourse quality index’ developed by Steenbergen et al. (2003) and the ‘discourse opportunity structure’ framework used by Ferree et al. (2002). However, none of these approaches is directly related to the tenets of the neo-institutionalist literature.

Accordingly, this study tries to map discourse in a more encompassing way. To demonstrate the adequacy of the analytical approach presented here, it is applied to map the discourse on labour market policies in quality newspapers of six Western European countries (France, Germany, UK, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Austria) from 2004 until 2006. By analysing more than 2500 frames, the results provide systematic evidence that three major ideas structure the mediatized discourse on labour market policies in Western Europe: corporatist, neoliberal, and compensation frames. The salience of these ideas in mediatized discourses, in turn, shows a systematic relationship with politics, i.e. the actors’ perceived labour market policy interests, as well as the institutional legacies of the countries under concern. Further analyses show that the time-specific reform pressure, manifest in specific political constellations, plays a role in the variation in the framing patterns as well. In sum, the results corroborate the discursive institutionalist expectations regarding systematically differing discourse for our sample of six Western European countries.

## **INSTITUTIONAL COMPLEMENTARITIES AND COMPARISON OF DISCOURSES ACROSS COUNTRIES**

The basic tenet of the discursive institutionalist literature is that ideational processes help to explain both long-term institutional and short-term policy-specific changes (for an overview, see Schmidt [2008] or Béland [2009]). In the first step of an empirical application, it is thus necessary to trace the ideas that give rise to the actors’ discourse. Subsequently, as a discourse becomes routine, the corresponding ideas become enshrined in the institutional setting of a country (Blyth 2002). However, the ideas and their carrying institutions often lead to

conflicting interpretations, provoke opposition and thus may trigger changes in discourse, which, in turn, has the potential to reshape the institutional setting again. Béland (2009: 710) calls this process “symbolic and institutional translation”, which involves the enrichment of new ideas with given ones inherited from a country’s particular institutional legacy (see also Campbell 2004: 80). Therefore, politico-economic institutional complementarities thereby can be defined as being connected to a specific discourse, which tends to restrict the spectrum of available ideas in political struggles (Pfau-Effinger 2005).<sup>2</sup> For example, we would expect a discourse highlighting the benefits of flexibility and competitiveness to be more important in liberal market economies such as the UK.

Recognizing the important role that ideas play for institutional change first of all implies acknowledging that they are not purely epiphenomenal (see Campbell [2004] for a thorough discussion). However, this immediately raises the question of how they can be assessed in the first place. This contribution suggests that ideas can be empirically identified and systematically compared via an analysis of mass media content. The guiding assumption is that political conflicts in today’s established democracies are increasingly carried out in the media arena (Vliegenhardt and Walgrave 2008), which is why this study aims to show which ideas are introduced and become salient in the *mediatized* discourse. In fact, only ideas salient in the media have the potential to influence both policy-making and public opinion. The choice to rely on the mass media is therefore guided by the rationale that other sources such as party manifestoes or parliamentary debates may not contain information on all politically relevant interests. Actually, actors such as corporations or public administrations – which at times are crucially important to understand policy processes – have indeed often been neglected in previous studies.

As a working example, this study explores the role of ideas in mediatized discourse on labour market policy-making based on a content analysis of newspaper articles in six Western

European countries. The country sample comprises the three biggest European economies, France, Germany and the UK, and the three smaller Western European countries of Switzerland, the Netherlands and Austria. The fact that these countries are among the most often studied cases in the discursive institutionalist literature is advantageous since it provides clear benchmarks on what the quantitative analysis in this study should reveal. Beyond differences in their economic strength, the six countries differ considerably with respect to their historical pathways of economic development. Moreover, the six countries heavily differ in terms of the dynamics of the policy processes. By conducting the content analysis from 2004 to 2006, we can compare the aftermath of radical policy change (reform packages such as the ‘Hartz IV’ in Germany, the Wassenaar Agreement in the Netherlands and the ‘New Deal’ in the UK), a time of heightened pressure for reforms (the failed flexibilisation of employment conditions in France), and two comparatively stable situations with only incremental changes (in Switzerland and Austria). However, since we analyse heterogeneous countries in terms of their institutional design and the stage of the policy processes, we need to make sure that the data we use is actually comparable.

Most evidently, the analyses need to rely on similar mass media outlets in every country. The newspaper sample of the present study includes *Le Monde* (France), *The Times* (UK), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany), *NRC Handelsblad* (Netherlands), *Die Presse* (Austria) and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland). Quality newspapers were selected since they are particularly suited to studying the broader discourse. In fact, they remain the leading medium of political coverage, and both report the politically relevant discourse in the most detailed manner and influence the editorial decisions of a wide range of other news organizations (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2008). Thus, although the quality press should be perceived as part of the elite discourses, it nevertheless provides a differentiated picture of which ideas might gain relevance in the broader public sphere (see, e.g. Ferree et al. 2002). Of course, although the newspapers chosen are similar in terms of their location in the media

market and their journalistic style, the sample still contains heterogeneity. For instance, *The Times* is widely deemed a centre-right outlet, while the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in general is perceived as centre-left (Strömbäck and Kaid 2008). Hence, specific sampling, coding and aggregation strategies have to be applied in order to further minimize media bias.

First, the selection of documents needs to be designed in such a way that the national differences in a specific policy field do not lead to a selection bias. To achieve this aim, the policy under scrutiny needs to be defined in a broad way, which ensures that the selection of documents is sensitive enough to the peculiarities in behaviours, outcomes, procedures, and institutions that emanate from the national labour market policy subsystems. In the following study, the relevant events in the labour market policy processes in each country were first identified using various yearbooks as well as the annual reviews of the newspapers in our sample – see the summary in the online appendix for an overview of the policies coded in the content analysis, as well as Kaufman (2004: 45) for an operational definition of labour market policies. These lists of events led to an extensive keyword search for relevant documents in electronic newspaper archives. In addition, a chronological sample of the same number of articles per country was drawn (1200 each). Chronological sampling reflects the frequency distribution of relevant articles over time and therefore captures the peaks and troughs in the mediatized discourse.

Second, some of the coding instructions were specifically designed to minimize any unintended influence of the journalistic processing of the actor statements: no paid media content, op-eds or letters to the editor were considered as data sources; and no explicit expressions of opinion by journalists in the editorial articles were included as actor statements.

Third, the collected data need to be aggregated using probability weights. It is important to note that data derived from media documents statistically behave like survey data

sampled at two levels, i.e. the country and news document levels. The basic assumption that there are equal chances for every actor statement to be included in the sample is clearly violated because different media outlets report more or less intensely on policies and the selected articles contain different numbers of relevant statements. Thus, the original data needs to be weighted relative to the total number of statements in the same document as well as relative to the overall number of statements in the respective media outlet.

Following these guidelines, researchers can be confident that the data are not decisively distorted by the collection and aggregation procedures. Thus, systematic tests of explanations, which highlight the role of institutional legacies for mediatized discourse, become possible.

## **IDENTIFYING PERCEIVED INTERESTS AS POLICY POSITIONS AND IDEAS AS FRAMES**

The previous section has discussed how mediatized discourse can be systematically compared across different contexts to provide evidence on its connection to institutional differences. This section instead focuses on the relationship between perceived interests and the ideas of political actors. To define interests, we can go back to Lukes (1974) and Geuss (1981), who argue that particular institutional contexts and the material basis predefine political actors' interests. However, the way in which an actor *perceives* his or her interests can deviate from their material or contextual predefinition. Particularly in a framework entailing uncertainty, actors cannot be expected to determine what their actual interests are and hence need to rely on heuristics and shortcuts to determine their interests. In the end, however, as political scientists who engage in content analyses, we are merely able to measure the actors' perceived interests (Hay 2011). More precisely, the political actors' perceived interests can be identified by tracing their policy positions in the mass media. Of course, the discursive actions



undertaken by political actors who resort to framing strategies may, in turn, lead to changing perceived preferences of concurring actors. Thus, the process of interest-formation and interest-communication should be understood as a dynamic political process.

As for the identification of ideas, we follow Campbell (2002) and Béland (2009), who show how the concept of framing can be integrated into ideational approaches of institutional change. To conceptualize ideas as frames means to focus on the “central organizing ideas that provide coherence to a designated set of idea elements” (Ferree et al. 2002: 105). Accordingly, we understand ideas as frames, which are used by political actors to define a problem that needs to be solved as well as to disclose what the causal interpretation of this problem should be (Entman 1993: 52). In a similar vein, (Béland 2009: 707) argues that framing can be regarded as “value amplification”, which means that actors often draw on a society’s cultural repertoire in order to construct frames that promote their policy ideas. Likewise, it is usually assumed that framing contests are related to underlying paradigmatic conflicts, which resonate with the broader cultural and societal context of the mediatized discourse and form the basis for the actors’ assumptions and interpretations of the policies at stake (Entman 2004: 14).

Thus we start from the presumption that the perceived interests of political actors at least partly shape their framing. The actors’ perception of interests is hence expected to set clear limits to their discursive strategy in terms of the ideas they convey. In fact, once committed to a particular definition of what their interests are (or should be), these actors need to display continuity in the communication of their ideas to be a credible protagonist in the discourse on specific policies. Such consistency is pivotal to ensure their reputation as representatives of specific constituencies and their trustworthiness as political allies (Kriesi 2004). The actors’ framing, and with it the policy interpretations and solutions they propose, is thus influenced by political constraints, i.e. the other actors’ attempts to shape the course of

the mediatized discourse (Chong and Druckman 2007). In other words, political actors seek to legitimize their policy choices by means of frames, which justify their perceived interests in order to win over allies and to mobilize the support of the public or particular constituencies (Surel 2000; Cox 2001). The communication of these ideas is thus at least partly a strategic exercise, and mediatized discourse is shaped by the competition among actors trying to overcome the scepticism of other actors and the public to persuade them of their ideas.

Following this conceptualization, the Core Sentence Analysis (CSA, see Kriesi et al. [2012]) can be used to reliably chronicle the actors' perceived interests and ideas in mediatized discourse. More precisely, after selecting a representative set of media documents, these can be coded inductively into stylized representations of the actors' policy positions and their framing. Table 1 illustrates the coding procedure: if a policy statement of a relevant actor is found in a text segment, this segment is reduced to its essential structure that contains only the subject actor, the policy position (reflecting the actors' perceived interest), and the justification of the policy position (reflecting the actors' framing).<sup>3</sup> The two policy statements in the example refer to Gordon Brown's support of public sector restructuring, which he underlines by calls 'to stay disciplined'. These justifications were recoded in a second step as justifications related to the idea of austerity.

*Table 1* CSA coding example

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*In his first big speech on the economy since the Budget, the Chancellor will warn civil service unions that there will be no going back on his demand for 40,000 job cuts, and no return to the days of inflationary wage deals. [...] Mr. Brown is to argue that failure to stay disciplined will jeopardise Britain's hard-won platform of economic stability.*

(The Times, April 21, s, Page 21, ‘Chancellor says more Whitehall jobs to go’)

Actor	Policy statement	Position	Frame
Gordon Brown	job cuts	+	fiscal discipline (austerity)
Gordon Brown	wage moderation	+	fiscal discipline (austerity)

The CSA approach has several useful properties, which can be utilized for discursive institutionalist analyses. First, the unit of analysis is located at the propositional level, which is why perceived interests can be explored individually for each actor (see Chong and Druckman 2007). Second, CSA data are a fine-grained and standardized representation of the content, which is why their quality can be assessed internally, i.e. across different coders, and externally, i.e. opposite alternative data sources. In a pre-test, six coders obtained a coefficient of reliability of 0.77 for coder agreement on the identification of policy statements, which is acceptable (see Lombard, Snyder-Dutch and Bracken [2002]). Inter-coder agreement for the correct annotation of actors and frames was equally admissible (0.88 and 0.74, respectively). Moreover, comparisons of CSA data with data from expert judgments, party manifesto coding, and mass surveys suggest that the external validity is given as well (Helbling and Tresch 2011). Third, the CSA coding approach is essentially an inductive one. Therefore, the policy statements of each article in the selected articles were coded as long as they relate to labour market policies. The implication thereof is that all actors and the full range of interests and frames are included in the data. The data thus reflect in a valid way which ideas are salient for which actor in the six countries during the research period. Among others, our country sample will thus provide evidence for the relationship between framing and policy processes, since we can compare the mediatized discourse in the aftermath of radical policy

changes (in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK) to discourses in times of heightened reform pressure (in France) and comparatively stable situations (in Switzerland and Austria).

The coding of our working example yielded over 2512 statements. The resulting diversity of the actors present in the data, and the heterogeneity of the single frames brought forward in the mediatized discourse on labour market policies, made it reasonable to rearrange the actors and frames first into more general categories before comparing them across countries (Kriesi et al. 2012). Hence, the classification of actors first distinguishes public authority actors, i.e. national executives, public administrations, EU actors, intergovernmental organization (IGO) actors, and foreign governments. All these actors somehow have a legitimate responsibility to provide public goods or to regulate economic markets. Next, we distinguish intermediary actors (i.e. parties and interest groups), who aggregate societal problems and demands, and translate them into political claims. The statements of parties are grouped into the categories communists/ socialists, greens, social democrats, Christian democrats/conservatives, liberal parties and populist right parties. The statements of interest groups are aggregated into the categories trade unions, public interest groups, white-collar professional organizations, small business organizations, think tanks, and peak employer organizations. Finally, many business actors engaging in mediatized discourse on labour market policies were found. We classified them into global corporations (defined as corporations listed in the Forbes ranking of the world's 2000 biggest companies), public enterprises and niche firms (which are neither big multinational corporations nor publicly owned ones).

Similarly to the actors, the frames coded featured a high heterogeneity in terms of their degree of abstraction and informative value (see a summary in the online appendix). Accordingly, a general set of initial categories was developed to which the inductively coded frames could be allocated. To begin with, a large part of the justifications was found to centre

on the antagonism between social protection and productivity. Essentially, this antagonism revolves around whether the unemployed and welfare recipients are perceived as being lazy and need work requirements, means-tested benefits and activating incentives, or whether they are perceived as suffering from structural hardship that entitles them to rely on solidarity and de-commodification (see van Oorschot 2000, Ross 2000b: 178). A second cluster of justifications focused on the question of whether state intervention is understood as a problem (austerity frames) or the solution (regulation frames) to challenges stemming from structural changes such as demographic shifts, sluggish growth or deindustrialization (see Pierson 2001). Austerity frames express scepticism toward state provision and support of market-based approaches to social problems. Regulation frames, in contrast, comprise arguments emphasizing the state's obligation to intervene in labour markets and provide legislation in response to changing demands. Two further types of frames centred on the question of national economic competitiveness: many policy positions were justified in the light of the need to promote business for the world markets, or to protect parts of the national economy from the vagaries of global markets (see Rodrik 2006). Finally, a last set of frames focuses on social investment (Fossati and Häusermann forthcoming). These frames highlight aspects of labour market reforms such as human capital training, consumer rights, and ecological aspects, as well as investments in individual quality of life.

To conclude, CSA is a versatile instrument able to capture the full complexity of mediatized discourse without taking risks in terms of reliability and reproducibility. In the following section, we apply systematic statistical methods to show how explanations brought forward in the literature to explain the relationship among institutional legacies, perceived interests and the communication of frames in the media arena can be generalized.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF MEDIATIZE DISCOURSE ON LABOR MARKET POLICIES**

Our working example is labour market policy discourse. The most basic question of how discourse on labour market policies is structured into underlying dimensions is answered by performing a factor analysis on the actors' policy positions – i.e. their perceived interests in labour market liberalization – and their emphasis of the seven-frame cluster as defined in the previous section – i.e. social protection, productivity, austerity, regulation, economic promotion, protection and social investment frames. In substantial terms, this analysis establishes the grid that underlies mediatized discourse. It can show which frames are similar in terms of the actors' interests regarding the justifications they use to support or oppose liberalizing labour market reforms. As for the calculation, the policy positions of the 87 actors in the data set were first multiplied by the frequency by which particular frames were used (hereafter *frame emphasis*). In a second step, the number of factors was assessed by performing an eigenvalue test (results shown in Figure A1 in the online appendix), which indicates a three-factor solution as an optimal representation of the structure of mediatized discourse in this policy domain (see Table 2).

*Table 2* Factor analysis of frame-related policy positions and frame emphasis

	<i><b>Factor 1</b></i>	<i><b>Factor 2</b></i>	<i><b>Factor 3</b></i>
Regulation	<b>0.32</b>	-0.07	-0.05
Social protection	<b>0.51</b>	0.15	<b>0.30</b>
Social investment	<b>0.41</b>	-0.24	<b>0.39</b>
Productivity	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.33</b>	0.09
Austerity	-0.09	<b>0.61</b>	0.16
Economic promotion	0.08	<b>0.40</b>	-0.12
Protection	0.03	0.03	<b>0.61</b>
Eigenvalues	1.75	1.38	1.09

Variance explained	0.11	0.10	0.10
N	87	87	87
Label	Corporatist	Neoliberal	Compensation

*Note:* Maximum-likelihood factor analysis, varimax rotated.

As shown in Table 2, productivity, regulation, social protection and social investment substantially load on the first factor.<sup>4</sup> Productivity has a factor loading of 0.49, regulation loads with 0.32, and social protection and social investment have values of 0.51 and 0.41, respectively. This dimension therefore combines arguments regarding the need of labour market policies to be market conforming, but with a commitment to state intervention, social safety and sustainable development. These ideas highlight an economic growth strategy that is firmly embedded into state regulation and emphasizes socially sound progress, and thus most closely follows the ideas of corporatist development as it is deeply rooted in continental Western European politics (see Schmidt [2002b]; Hays 2009).

While regulation exclusively loads on the first factor, the other frame categories also contribute to other factors. Productivity, to begin with, additionally loads on the second factor (loading of 0.33), which is built around the austerity frame (loading of 0.61) and also includes arguments regarding economic promotion (loading of 0.40). This dimension stands, on the one hand, for the argument that the public sector (and state regulation in general) creates problems such as excessive public debt and therefore needs retrenchment. On the other hand, the need to help business in becoming competitive on world markets (economic promotion) is an important aspect of this labour market policy framing. In sum, these ideas should best be attributed to the global diffusion of neoliberalism during the last two decades (Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett 2006), which results in continuous pressures for budgetary rigor, deregulation and business-friendly incentives.

Social protection and social investment, by contrast, associate with the protectionist frames of a third factor. Protection loads on this factor to a high degree (loading of 0.61), while social protection frames (loading of 0.30) and social investment arguments (loading of 0.39) are contributing less but still substantially to this factor. As for the other dimensions of the labour market policy framing, this factor is clearly reflected in the literature as well. Historically, labour market liberalization in Western Europe only was politically sustainable if coupled with an extension of the welfare states or the selective protection of specific economic sectors from international competition (Katzenstein 1985). Thus, particularly in the context of globalized labour markets that increase the risks for workers, these frames reflect demands for compensation, in either a welfare or territorial sense.

## **POLITICS, INSTITUTIONAL LEGACIES, AND THE FRAMING OF LABOUR MARKET POLICIES**

The previous section has established that three dimensions of labour market policy discourse – which resonate well with the comparative political economy literature – are empirically identifiable in Western Europe. The following analysis builds upon these results and sheds light on possible correlates to their frame emphasis. As already mentioned, the interplay between institutions and politics is highlighted in the literature as crucial to the understanding of discursive processes. Hence, we can explore how the frame dimensions are used in dependence on the actor categories and the countries included in our sample. Accordingly, for the following estimations, the relative frequency is calculated as the sum of the frames that are substantially correlated with a particular dimension in the last section weighted by their factor loading. Table 3 reports on the results of an ordinary least squares regression on the actors' and countries' relative emphasis of corporatism, neoliberalism, and compensation. For both the country and actor categories, the category with the lowest relative emphasis of the



respective dimension was chosen as the reference. Significant deviances from the reference category therefore show whether actors or countries are using a specific frame dimension significantly more often.

*Table 3* OLS regression results of actor types and countries on the emphasis of the three dimensions of public discourse on labour market policies<sup>a</sup>

	Corporatist frames			Neoliberal frames			Compensation frames		
	Estimates	Std. Error	Pr (> t )	Estimates	Std. Error	Pr (> t )	Estimates	Std. Error	Pr (> t )
National executives	0.042	0.081		0.156	0.066	*	0.134	0.074	.
Public administrations	0.154	0.081	.	0.168	0.066	*	0.056	0.074	
EU actors	0.157	0.088	.	0.050	0.072		0.109	0.079	
IGO actors	0.153	0.106		0.264	0.09	**	-- reference --		
Foreign governments	0.009	0.083		0.033	0.068		0.288	0.077	***
Communists/left socialists	0.194	0.087	*	-- reference --			0.232	0.079	**
Green parties	0.271	0.135	*	0.070	0.115		0.140	0.113	
Social democratic parties	0.152	0.089	.	0.081	0.073		0.137	0.079	.
Christ. dem./Conservatives	0.097	0.084		0.163	0.069	*	0.111	0.076	
Liberal parties	0.116	0.105		0.106	0.088		0.160	0.091	.
Populist right parties	-- reference --			0.176	0.077	*	0.150	0.083	.
Trade unions	0.107	0.081		0.033	0.066		0.197	0.074	*
Public interest groups	0.034	0.081		0.096	0.066		0.161	0.074	*
White-collar prof. org.	0.209	0.089	*	0.027	0.073		0.091	0.079	
Small bus. organisations	0.018	0.088		0.040	0.072		0.225	0.078	**
Think tanks	0.064	0.088		0.109	0.072		0.196	0.079	*
Peak empl. organisations	0.006	0.081		0.285	0.066	***	0.035	0.074	
Global corporations	0.095	0.081		0.247	0.066	***	0.036	0.074	
Niche firms	0.128	0.081		0.174	0.066	*	0.073	0.074	
Public enterprises	0.207	0.095	*	0.193	0.078	*	0.021	0.084	

Austria	0.140	0.046	**	0.063	0.039	0.016	0.036
France	0.120	0.044	**	-- reference --		0.067	0.034
Germany	0.174	0.046	***	0.038	0.04	0.033	0.036
Netherlands	0.064	0.042		0.025	0.036	0.051	0.033
Switzerland	0.045	0.045		0.060	0.038	0.059	0.035
UK	-- reference --			0.152	0.039	***	-- reference --
(Intercept)	0.196	0.075	*	-0.010	0.055	-0.003	0.070
N	87			87		87	
R-squared	0.45			0.56		0.53	
F-statistic	2.08 (24/62 DF) *			3.30 (24/62 DF) ***		2.92 (24/62 DF) ***	

*Note:* P-values:  $p \leq 0.001=***$ ,  $p \leq 0.01=**$ ,  $p \leq 0.05=*$ ,  $p \leq 0.1=.$

<sup>a</sup> Unstandardised coefficients, standard errors and levels of significance.

The intercepts indicate that corporatist frames are by far the most frequently used ideas irrespective of the differences among actors and countries. The values of the R-squared (0.45, 0.56 and 0.53) as well as the significant F-statistic for all three models imply that the actors' perceived preferences and country differences are substantially correlated with the variation of all frame dimensions. These findings can thus be interpreted as general evidence that institutional complementarities and politics play a substantial role in explaining differences in mediatized discourse.

As for corporatist frames, it becomes evident that especially left actors and public authorities or enterprises have a substantially stronger preference to use them than the populist right parties (reference category). In terms of the classification used in this study, 'old' left actors (social democrats, communist and radical socialist parties, and trade unions) as well as 'new' left actors (greens and public interest groups) are counted as part of the political left. Three of these five actors, i.e. the social democratic parties, communist and radical socialist parties, and greens, show an at least 15% higher propensity to employ corporatist arguments

in the labour market policy discourse. The same holds for the public administrations, EU actors and public enterprises as well as for the white-collar professional organizations, but not for actors clearly attributable to the political right (most notably the liberal, Christian democratic/conservative and populist right parties, the peak employers' associations, as well as global corporations). There is thus a consensus among some public actors and all actors from the left that economic growth needs state regulation and social stabilization. This does not hold for the most important public authority actor, the national executives. Moreover, as will be discussed below, public authorities and enterprises show a disproportionately frequent usage of neoliberal frames, which of course sets corporatist arguments off to a large extent. Neoliberal frames, instead, are not emphasized by the representatives of the EU in the national mediatized discourses. This is remarkable, since the EU is often blamed for pushing for a deepening and deregulation of the European Single Market (see, e.g. Thatcher [2006]). EU actors, in contrast, seem to give slight support to the eco-social market model with regard to their framing strategy, which could originate from the flexicurity model they proposed in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997.

A phalanx of right-wing, business, and public authority actors with a high usage of neoliberal frames can be identified. This result is clearest for the peak employers' associations, IGO actors and global corporations who show a 28.5%, 26.4% and 24.7% higher emphasis of neoliberal frames than the communists and left socialists. National executives, public administrations, Christian democrats/conservatives, populist right parties, niche firms and public enterprises are also characterized by a significantly stronger preference for deregulation, budgetary rigor and business-friendly incentives than the far left. While this is not surprising, it could also have been expected for the liberal parties and the EU actors. The former, however, use compensation frames slightly more often. The latter, as already outlined, are only employing corporatist frames relatively often.

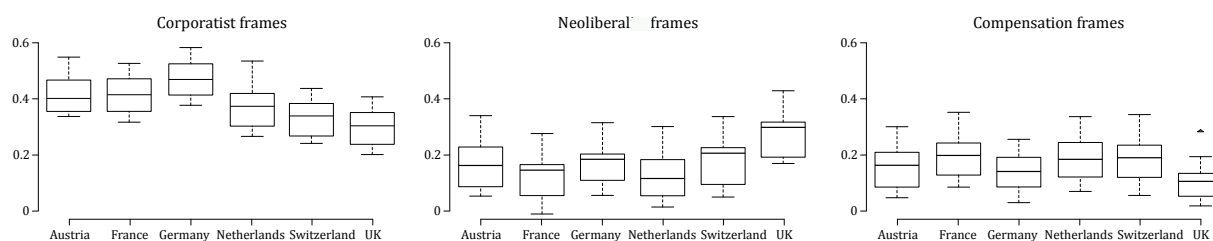
The results for the compensation frames confirm that a ‘packaging of policies’ in Western European welfare politics should increasingly be anticipated (see Häusermann 2010). Due to the pressure for more flexible and transnational labour markets, demand for socially and nationally protective policy solutions is expected to on both sides of the political spectrum (Oesch 2008). The results indeed support the view that traditionally protectionist right actors such as the small business associations and the radical populist parties (see Katzenstein [1985]) are showing the same frame emphasis as left actors (communists and left socialists, social democrats, trade unions and public interest groups). Among these actors, communists and left socialists (23.2%) and small business associations (22.5%) have the strongest increase in compensation frames compared to the IGO actors, whose least frequent usage of social and territorial protection arguments is also understandable. Beyond that, foreign governments are most insistent with compensation arguments (28.8%). Thus, they intervene in the national discourse mainly to call for the sheltering of the economically vulnerable parts of the workforce. Further frequent users of compensation frames are national executives and think tanks.

As far as the actors are concerned, their framing strategies thus largely resonate with their perceived interests in mediatized discourse on labour market policies. However, there are also clear patterns with respect to the frame usage across countries. The regression results in Table 3 can thereby be deepened by displaying the predicted probability distribution by countries (Figure 1) as well as key figures of the societal and economic development in which mediatizes discourse is embedded (Table 4). To begin with, similarly to policy positions, which systematically vary according to differences in coordination patterns between countries (see Wueest [2013]), the communication of frames seems to be at least partly shaped by the institutional legacies of countries, too. This becomes most clear in the exceptional framing pattern found for the UK. The only ‘liberal’ market economy – according to Hall and Soskice’s (2001) influential definition of the two varieties of capitalism – shows by far the

lowest usage of corporatist and compensation frames. This is not surprising since in the UK, economic players are coordinated by more competitive and hierarchical market arrangements (Thatcher 2006), which is in line with the lower propensity to employ corporatist and compensation frames. In contrast, the UK stands out as far as the intensity of neoliberal framing is concerned. *Ceteris paribus*, actors in the UK are 15.2% more likely to rely on neoliberal arguments than in France (see Table 3). Ross (2000a: 183) holds that, in addition to the market-oriented politico-economic institutional setting, the two-party system and the enfeeblement of the trade unions have increased the impact of neoliberal ideas in the UK. The framing among the other countries varies less than in comparison with the UK. These ‘coordinated’ market economies (see Hall and Soskice, 2001) share similar patterns of the coordination of economic activities, which are less based on market-oriented mechanisms, as the OECD Employment Protection Legislation (EPL) index shows.<sup>5</sup> The EPL index measures the extent to which a firms’ ability to fire their workers is constrained by collective agreements or national legislation. Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland clearly have less flexible labour markets than the UK. In these coordinated institutional systems, state officials first of all need to seek agreements among business and labour officials when reforms are at stake (Béland 2009: 710). This social partnership favours a ‘coordinative discourse’ (Schmidt 2002a) and, correspondingly, the usage of corporatist frames. With a 6.7% higher usage of compensation frames, the labour market policy discourse in France is more solidly grounded in a discourse of social rights and national protection than in the other countries. Although this difference distinguishes France only weakly, it resonates with the high polarization of welfare politics – especially the high militancy of the trade unions (see Ross 2000a: 180) – and the powerful role of the state in economic policy-making. Thus, the results are in line with the institutionalist diagnosis of France as a ‘state-influenced’ (Schmidt 2009), ‘entrepreneurial’ (Thibergien 2007), or ‘centralized’ market economy (Fioretos 2011). Decision-making and implementation processes in France are characterized

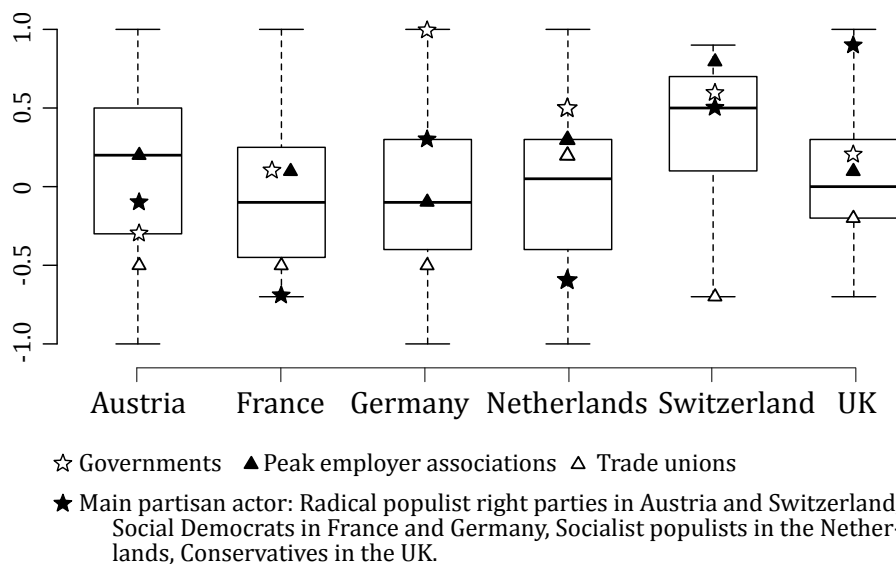
by a higher degree of centralization, and hence modernization strategies have traditionally relied on major industrial projects involving far-reaching state intervention (Baccaro and Simoni 2008). This increases the usage of compensation-related arguments since nationally oriented businesses have more leverage in the political process.

*Figure 1* Frame emphasis and policy positions by country



*Note:* Predicted probabilities derived from regressions as shown in Table 3.

*Figure 2* Actor positions towards labour market liberalisation



In sum, there is indication of a systematic relationship between different institutional complementarities and the framing of mediatized discourse on labour market policies.

However, as the considerable variation of the framing patterns among the coordinated market economies in our sample shows, this does not seem to be the full story (see Figure 1). For instance, it is not obvious why Germany and Austria should exhibit a significantly higher emphasis on corporatist frames and substantially lower use of compensation frames than the Netherlands and Switzerland. The latter two countries arguably are usually described as being similar to Germany and Austria (see, e.g. Schnyder and Heemskerk [2008]). Hence, besides institutional reasons, political constellations may provide additional insights into why the frames are unevenly distributed across the coordinated market economies. CSA data have the advantage that they can be disaggregated and explored to analyse the policy positions of all actors (see Figure 2). These range from decisive opposition (-1) to strong support (+1) for labour market liberalization reforms. We show the positions of countries for all actors (as box plots) as well as for four key actors in the mediatized discourse: governments, the most important party actor, trade unions and peak employer associations.

In Austria, despite the median policy position being clearly pro-liberalization, three of the four major actors actually oppose labour market liberalization. The coalition government of the centre-right Austrian People's Party and the populist right Freedom Party of Austria as well as the trade unions is clearly speaking out against liberalization reforms. The usually very strong Social Democratic Party of Austria, in contrast, was not able to play an important role in the mediatized discourse from 2003 to 2006. The fact that there is a comparatively high share of corporatist and neoliberal frames in Austria (see Figure 1) might thus be related to the dominance of politically right actors as well as to the overall quite liberalization-friendly policy context. The situation in Austria could therefore be interpreted as an expression of 'the social construction of the need to reform' (Cox 2001: 475), i.e. a perceived urgency of the majority of actors that reform efforts are indeed necessary.

In a similar vein, the conservative government led by Sarkozy and the peak employer associations take an ambivalent stance toward labour market reforms in France. However, the reluctance of the political right in France to endorse labour market liberalization is situated in an overall quite liberalization-sceptical context, which might well be connected to the high share of compensation frames and low share of neoliberal frames, respectively. In Germany, the Social Democrats were in government during the research period – until 2005 as leading and later as junior partner – and pushed for their Agenda 2010 liberalization reforms. Since they also dominate the mediatized discourse in terms of party politics and framed their reform proposals as a rescue of the traditional social market model, compensation frames are used less and neoliberal frames are used more in Germany.

In the Netherlands, a quite consistent group of moderately pro-liberalization actors (the government, peak employer associations and trade unions) is challenged by the populist left Socialist Party, which fiercely opposes labour market reforms. In a similar vein, we find a quite homogenous group in Switzerland (the government, the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party and the peak employer associations), which faces radical trade unions. In such a polarized situation, the importance of compensation frames could be interpreted as an appeasement strategy of the dominant political actors toward their political counterparts. In the UK, finally, we identify moderate trade unions and a radically pro-liberalization partisan actor – the Conservatives. Together with the slightly supportive Labour government, the main policy interests endorse liberalizing labour market reforms. This can be related to the framing, since – as already outlined – the UK can be distinguished from the other countries by its starkly neoliberal discourse.

## **CONCLUSION**



The main aim of this contribution was to answer the repeated calls for a departure from the typical case study design in discursive institutionalist studies. More precisely, we suggested a quantitative content analysis approach to complement the growing qualitative research on discursive institutionalism. This framework allows empirical mapping of discourse in a highly systematic way using mass media content analysis. A particular strength of this approach is the possibility to generate detailed and versatile data, which can be adapted to the specific needs of research projects without losing their comparability across single countries, policy realms, and longer time periods. Furthermore, the data generation process is transparent and its reliability can be put under scientific scrutiny.

The working example of the labour market policy discourse in six Western European countries has revealed that the approach is valid in the sense that we find results corresponding to the well-established comparative political economy literature. A first analysis showed that three dimensions structure the framing of labour market policies, namely, corporatism, neoliberalism and compensation. As compared to previous contributions, however, we are able to map the composition of these ideas in greater detail. The first and strongest dimension, which was identified as the corporatist dimension, highlights an economic growth strategy, which is firmly embedded into state regulation and socially sustainable development. The second dimension can be attributed to the global diffusion of neoliberal ideas, summarizing arguments on the need for budgetary rigor and deregulation in general. The frames of the third dimension refer to demands for social or territorial protection, reflecting the need to cushion labour market deregulation with promises to extend the welfare state or to selectively protect specific economic sectors from international competition. These major ideas and the illustration of their composition could be inductively derived from the many single statements placed in the mediatized discourse of the six countries by a multitude of different political actors.

Moreover, it could be demonstrated that political constellations and the institutional legacies also are related to the framing of labour market policies. The empirical analyses show that politically right as well as public authority actors are pursuing neoliberal frames. Despite several studies on centre-right and centre-left party convergence on economic issues (e.g. Kriesi et al. 2008), mainstream left parties show a distinct frame emphasis. They prefer to rely on corporatist and compensation frames. Likewise, the findings showed that the international diffusion of neoliberal ideas from the 1980s on has not led to a hegemonic neoliberal discourse in Western Europe (e.g. van Apeldoorn 2002). The decade-old ideas related to corporatism and demands for compensation still appear very prominently in the mediatized discourse. Liberal market systems such as the UK clearly foster the domination of a ‘communicative discourse’ (Schmidt 2002a), which leads to a decrease of corporatist frames and an increase of a neoliberal framing aimed at convincing the public opinion to support deregulation reforms. The discourse in continental Western European countries, by contrast, is shaped by corporatist frames, which reflects a preference for a ‘coordinative discourse’ (Schmidt 2002a). In the latter group of countries, the discourse in France additionally stands out by a higher emphasis on arguments related to state protections from the vagaries of free markets.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Following Schmidt (2008) and Campbell and Pedersen (2001), we use ‘discursive institutionalism’, which is the most common term. However, other terms such as ideational or constructivist institutionalism (see Hay 2001 and 2006) are used as well to denote very similar theoretical perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is possible to study discourse both as causing policy processes and as contingent on the institutional context. For the following quantitative analysis, we simply assume that discourse and institutions are systematically related to each other without implying specific causal mechanisms.

<sup>3</sup> Since actors regularly back their policy positions in mediatized discourses with multiple justifications (see Lerch and Schwellnus [2006: 307]), the coding of multiple frames per core sentence was allowed.

<sup>4</sup> In line with the recommendations by the literature, we define a factor loading of 0.32 or higher as a minimum threshold for the inclusion of a variable in a factor (see Costello and Osborne [2005: 4]).

<sup>5</sup> Average EPL index values from 1990 to 2008: France=2.80, Germany=2.52, Netherlands=2.34, Austria=2.04, Switzerland=1.06, UK=0.59 (Source: OECD, <http://stats.oecd.org/>, [13.08.2013]).

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